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Gritty Metropoetics in Ada Cambridge's "London" and Émile Verhaeren's "Londres"

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Note on Contributor
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During the 1880s, the United Kingdom was going from strength to strength under Queen Victoria, whose Golden Jubilee on 20 June 1887 brought together the British Empire's elite for sumptuous celebrations in London. Amid soaring temperatures, fifty representatives of a quarter of the planet's population participated in a banquet at Buckingham Palace. These festivities involved an elite enjoying the fruits of widespread growth in industries ranging from textiles to metallurgy, as "London played the role of a huge economic machine animating trade flows throughout England" (De Landa 1997, 232–233). Such streams of industrial wealth contrasted with the circumstances of many citizens in the capital, especially families sleeping rough in Trafalgar Square, within a mile of the royal household. Just over a year earlier, on Monday 8 February 1886, working-class conditions had been so dire that thousands of unemployed Londoners had congregated in the square around Nelson's Column to demonstrate under the banner of the Social Democratic Federation. This gathering culminated in unmarshaled attendees smashing windows and looting shops on the way to Hyde Park until a charge by truncheon-wielding police compelled them to relent. The events of "Black Monday," which heralded the socialist tumult of "Bloody Sunday" on 13 November 1887, were emblematic of civic inequalities during the Long Depression of 1873–1896. Beside economic insecurity, the majority of London's populace was exposed to toxic air due to manufacturers' surging consumption of coal: "lengthy London fogs provided stark evidence of the health threats of coal smoke in Britain" (Stradling and Thorsheim 1999, 13). Spurred by numerous deaths attributable to pollution, organizations such as the National Smoke Abatement Institution spent much of the 1880s striving for legislation to counterbalance industries causing health problems, though little progress was made. All in all, turn-of-the-century London was a gritty place, beset by environmental and social problems that transfixed observers from diverse backgrounds, including poets residing beyond the United Kingdom's shores.

Ada Cambridge (1844–1926) had emigrated from the United Kingdom to Australia more than fifteen years before the anonymous publication of *Unspoken Thoughts*, including the sardonic verse of "London" (1887, 107). Having departed from her native Norfolk in 1870, shortly after marrying the Reverend George Cross, Cambridge had spent the best part of the two decades prior to the work's release as a missionary around Melbourne, which had put her in close quarters with the kinds of sociocultural issues highlighted in the poem. On 6 August 1887, in one of the first reviews of *Unspoken Thoughts*, *The Daily Telegraph* in Sydney noted "the constant preoccupation evinced here with the problems of life and the soul […] in a world subject to the material rule of iron necessity" (9). The collection revolving around the physical and psychological pressures of a materialistic society is fundamentally critical in attitude: "*Unspoken Thoughts* emerged from the social and theological ferment that coincided with the largesse of 1880s Melbourne […]. For Cambridge, […] her subject matter scrutinized the full spectrum of society" (Davidson 2010, 29). The incisive spirit of the set of poems is epitomized in Cambridge's sonnet about London that vilifies high society for ignoring the plight of the hungry and homeless people surrounding their sophisticated carriages, and that reserves particular vitriol for women perceived as having sold themselves into marriage for elevated status. The opening octave dwells on the capital's environment in terms of mud and garbage, juxtaposed with rich Londoners' luxurious possessions and bodies. In the closing sestet, Cambridge vaunts the prospect of a judgment separating egalitarian souls and a moneyed elite, with punishment allotted to those guilty of perpetuating injustice. Overall, the poem focusses on social issues that are traceable to a growing disparity in wealth distribution associated with the industrial boom.

Ten thousand miles from Ada Cambridge's emigrant abode, the Belgian writer Émile Verhaeren (1855–1916) took an opportunity in *Les soirs* (*The Evening Hours*) to present the downcast verse of "Londres" (London) (1888, 45–46; 2014, 39), which displays his recourse to French as a prestige language, as opposed to his mother tongue of Flemish Dutch. Verhaeren's brief visits to the United Kingdom, including a trip with the Dutch-Indonesian painter Jan Toorop in 1885, played a central role in shaping the stark vision of industrial London that emerges with such potency and lucidity in his poetry. On 25 August 1888, *The Saturday Review* in London offered a trailblazing account of Verhaeren's work as part of an overview of Belgian and Dutch literature: "we must note especially the fruits of the pen of the young poet Verhaeren, whose reputation is steadily increasing. […] [He] has published a volume of verses, entitled *Les soirs* […]. His originality is […] strongly marked, and his poetry [is] both harmonious and clear" (246). The groundbreaking set of poems exemplifies a profound engagement with ecological issues associated with industrial modernity: "Verhaeren […] introduce[d] into Symbolist poetry social themes such as […] the transformation of cities by heavy industry, and generally prove[d] that powerfully imagined 'symbolist' poetry could […] reflect enormous and fast-moving social changes" (McGuinness 2015, 106). This capacity for communicating the intricacies of life in a time of accelerating industrialization is manifest in the sixteen lines of "Londres" that convey anguish in the capital afflicted by environmental and personal degradation. Metallic and smoky textures in the first and second quatrains frame a juxtaposition of ecclesiastical buildings that symbolize differences in the Anglo- and Francophone cultures beside the English Channel. As the third and fourth quatrains proceed, polluted London emerges as a place of waywardness, alcoholism and death. In sum, Verhaeren expresses ecological concerns regarding heavy industry's toxic impact on locations and people.

In thematic and temporal terms, there is a transnational correspondence between Ada Cambridge and Émile Verhaeren addressing London. The two authors were independent in

reaching their conclusions about the city's grittiness, but their sociopolitical contexts were not so different. Verhaeren came under the sway of Leopold II in a constitutional monarchy possessing the État indépendant du Congo (Congo Free State), just as Cambridge belonged to the British Empire with Queen Victoria at the helm. Aside from the language difference between "London" and "Londres," Verhaeren's perspective as an Anglophone foreigner has commonalities with Cambridge's standpoint as an expatriate. Since each poet was residing outside the United Kingdom at the point of composition, Cambridge and Verhaeren represent poetics of place that are in some measure extrinsic to the target sphere. This geographical dynamic prompts consideration of the role of space in identity formation, particularly regarding the entanglement of culture and the physical world: "the cultural and political contextualisation of all things national invariably unfolds in space" (Rembold and Carrier 2011, 374). If cultural artefacts are understood as providing context for events unfolding in reality, creative compositions such as the poems by Cambridge and Verhaeren can be valuable as repositories of sociopolitical and environmental data. In this light, a work's structure and content function as sites of material significance that are apt for consideration according to the principles of physical and human geography.

Cambridge and Verhaeren present London's varied geographies through similar terms, imagery, line lengths, rhyme patterns, and stanzaic structures. On this basis, both authors construct a type of *metropoetics* (Yaeger 2007, 21) that is an act of crafting (ποιεῖν) a point of origin (μήτηρ) for a common kind of urban experience in the United Kingdom during the concluding years of the nineteenth century. *Place identity* (Tuan 1977, 4) is thus integral to the composition of these works that foreground the consequences of advancing industry, not least in terms of personal and ecological problems. The *gritty* style of the two poems pertains to the granular texture of their form and content, particularly the portrayal of urban existence in very stark terms. In depicting tensions at the heart of the city beholden to heavy industry, each author is steely about grappling with contentious issues that raise questions about standards of living across society. As far as structure is concerned, both poems' rhymes and rhythms give a flavor of London's coarse materiality and grueling temporality through edgy cadences and striking pairings of words at prominent junctures. At this compositional level, Cambridge and Verhaeren are symbolic of the effort involved in coming to terms with turn-of-the-century London's complex identity:

> A grimy blizzard of soot, smoke, and damp known as "a London particular" […] grew along with the city's population and pollution. […] [N]ot only was the city in its obstreperous plenitude and ceaseless mobility resistant to efforts to view it poetically, it was also quite simply hard to see, thanks to fog, smoke, and darkness. (Sharpe 2011, 119)

As far as each narrative's place-making is concerned, Verhaeren's depiction is concerned with pollution in the capital, whereas Cambridge's account insists on London as a site of injustice. This difference is fundamental to the varieties of grittiness in the metropoetic works, each of which is unique in tone and areas of emphasis. Cambridge's sonnet is forthright and graphic, though rather abstract, and has five centers of interest: 1) the geography of the street; 2) upper-class goods; 3) the grouping of rich and poor; 4) women's status; 5) a prospective judgment for people with unacceptable morals. Verhaeren's poem is sensuous and haunting, if somewhat detached, and possesses four foci: 1) recognizable places of an evocative nature; 2) human experience in groups as opposed to individual soul-searching; 3) objects of modernity; 4) noxious elements linked to heavy industry. These

distinguishing features ultimately point to diverse ways of emotionally engaging with the changing climate of a place shaped by the Industrial Revolution.*

Cambridge's evocation of economic inequality in London takes the form of a two-stanza sonnet in ten-syllable lines, with a rhyme scheme of $a_1b_1b_1a_1a_2b_2b_2a_2$–cdcdee:

The gorgeous stream of England's wealth goes by,
  Mixed with the mud and refuse, as of old—
  The hungry, homeless, naked, sick and cold;
Want mocked by waste and greedy luxury.
There, in their downy carriage-cushions, lie
  Proud women whose fair bodies have been sold
  And bought for coronet or merchant gold—
For whose base splendours envious maidens sigh.

Some day the social ban will fall on them—
  On wanton rich who taunt their starving kin;
Some day the social judgment will condemn
  These "wedded harlots" in their shame and sin.
A juster world shall separate them then
From all pure women and all honoured men.

Physical geography is superseded by human geography in a narrative that contains only a single mention of a specific place, namely the national coordinate of "England" (line 1). This broad vista highlights the countrywide issue of economic inequality in an era of fiscal growth propelled by heavy industry. In contrast to Verhaeren's evocations of strategic sites, specific localities are not named, so the concerns of the sonnet are attributable to numerous parts of the metropolis. In terms of allusive possibilities, the "gorgeous stream of England's wealth" (line 1) is redolent of the flow of the Thames, with a hint of waterborne pollution due to sewage: "Mixed with […] refuse" (line 2). As far as explicit details are concerned, environmental features are limited to the "mud and refuse" (line 2) that convey grubbiness in areas lacking macadam or wooden paving. Due to the long-term connotations of "as of old" (line 2), the glutinous mud and decaying matter appear as timeworn as the inequality in wealth distribution among the city's inhabitants. There is little evidence of industrialization at an environmental level, other than the implicit presence of streets featuring private transportation with "carriage-cushions" (line 5), which suggest a much more luxurious vehicle than the hackney carriages used by many Londoners.

As far as the trappings of industrial modernity are concerned, two types of refined goods are on show in the space defined by financial status. Fine feathers drawn from elegant birds fill the "downy carriage-cushions" (line 5) that provide a soft berth for the "Proud women" (line 6) traveling through the city. The suppleness of the furnishings reflects the cultivated existence of the rich few, whose complexions possess a degree of delicacy that is absent from the gritty world outside the carriage. The second set of objects relates to precious metal in a form produced for economic profit. Use value is of paramount importance in the relationship between "coronet or merchant gold" (line 7) and the married women's "fair bodies" (line 6), which are treated as little more than objects priced according to attractiveness for a buyer. Gold's considerable worth as a rare element comes to the fore in the account of jewelry and coinage representing "base splendours" (line 8) with an enduring attraction as tokens of social standing. Similarly, if more understatedly, Verhaeren alludes to the problematic nature of gold by drawing attention to the unnerving luster of golden inscriptions advertising

alcohol. Throughout Cambridge's four lines referring to gold and cushions, a derogatory tone expresses a sense of misplaced values in a society fixated on material comforts made possible by industrialization. In this way, the poem conveys apprehensions about the extent to which "London […] had managed, over time, to accommodate and institutionalize both the new forces of industrial capitalism and the new powers of the middle class" (Horowitz 2010, 115). The narrative of improper affluence lacks evidence of food, clothes, medicine, and residences at the social spectrum's sharp end. Thanks to the insistent cadence of the third line, syllabically punctuated as 3+2+2+3, numerous Victorians' dreadful circumstances are highlighted. For "the hungry, homeless, naked, sick and cold" (line 3), no solace is forthcoming in objects, whether industrial or otherwise.

London's human inhabitants, who represent the core of the sonnet, are initially divided into the rich—described as "gorgeous" (line 1), in a pique of irony—and the lumpen mass of people beset by "Want" (line 4). Flows of currency through the hands of the elite are at odds with the stagnant misery of the many, who can only hang on the coat-tails of the moneyed few set on "waste and greedy luxury" (line 4). Though the street has the appearance of a "Mixed" (line 2) space involving Londoners across the economic spectrum, social divisions are clear. Alliteration in /m/ underscores the uncomfortable juxtaposition of the opulent few and the impoverished many: "stream" (line 1); "Mixed […] mud" (line 2); "homeless" (line 3); "mocked" (line 4). The lowly majority who glimpse the world of "merchant gold" (line 7) glittering within arm's reach may be incentivized to strive for "base splendours" (line 8), but the prospect of climbing the social ladder is dim and distant for most. With the recurrence of the idea of "refuse" (line 2) in "waste" (line 4), the people who are living the high life of the Industrial Age are condemned for lacking a social conscience, as success is shown to breed extravagance, not charity. This attentiveness to a populace separated by economic inequality differs from Verhaeren's inward looking evocation of psychological malaise. In Cambridge's sonnet, contempt abounds for the "wanton rich who taunt their starving kin" (line 10) in the depiction of the *haves* and *have-nots* experiencing parallel lives of reckless abandon or malnourishment. Alliteration in /t/ amplifies the reprehensible behavior of the decadent rich in the face of their famished compatriots: "wanton […] taunt […] starving" (line 10). For Cambridge, material wealth is no guarantee of prestige: "'London' […] incorporates the notion that riches are sinful, and that the rich have no *moral* right to any superiority they may feel over the poor" (Bradstock 1988, 61). This challenge to wealth-based authority throws into question the ethics of the privileged few at the higher end of an increasingly stratified populace. Half a century before the conception of a welfare state, the squalid conditions of the masses foreground civic shortcomings in a community with a short supply of "pure women and […] honoured men" (line 14) possessing the will and means to do right by their fellow Londoners.

Women of various types come under the spotlight throughout most of the sonnet. A principal distinction exists between "Proud women whose fair bodies have been sold" (line 6) and "envious maidens" (line 8). With the rhyme in /əʊld/ between "sold" (line 6) and "gold" (line 7), materialist values receive top billing. The contrast between arrivistes and forlorn others is based on a dynamic of chastity that culminates in the binary of "'wedded harlots' in their shame and sin" (line 12) and "pure women" (line 14). Women are vilified as avaricious for having undertaken a transactional relationship that involves rich men sexually exploiting their youthful bodies. Consecutive enjambments give rise to a twenty-one-syllable cascade of scorn about the arrivistes' status: "lie / Proud women whose fair bodies have been sold / And bought for coronet or merchant gold" (lines 5–7). The female onlookers "sigh[ing]" (line 8) with desire for such circumstances do not attract direct blame, but there is a subtle critique of

their morals being misdirected. Sibilance reinforces the ignoble circumstances of a sumptuous lifestyle achieved through marriage: "base splendours envious […] sigh" (line 8). By equating social climbing to prostitutes' behavior, the narrative adopts a harsh stance on the purported impurity of women who engage in advantageous marriages. Enjambment augments the gravitas of the twenty-syllable phrase foretelling a dark fate for the women in profitable marriages: "Some day the social judgment will condemn / These 'wedded harlots' in their shame and sin" (lines 11–12). This act has the appearance of impropriety because its basis is love for money rather than love for the other. Such an invective is striking because only women are targeted, not exploitative men, in a mode that verges on misogyny. Even if the heart of the problem is a lack of female solidarity on the arrivistes' part, male manipulation goes essentially uncriticized, in a troubling fashion. This gendered imbalance is not out of keeping with the poem's form, since the octave adopts a rhyme scheme indebted to Petrarch's poems about Laura in the fourteenth-century *Canzoniere*. On the other hand, the arrangement of the sestet, which is the sonnet's crux, has an urbane twist, just as Verhaeren's four quatrains conclude with an extended line that accentuates London's peculiar nature. Cambridge's narrative indicates that traditional configurations of power do not keep step with technological progress because the limit on acceptable behavior is primarily imposed on women. Since an intimate relationship's economics are at stake in this evaluation of female purity, the problem seems all the more acute in an era of booming finances for industrialists.

From Cambridge's point of view, people with unacceptable morals have no prospect of redemption. Her prediction of a reckoning, which is affirmatively couched in abundant sibilance, has an air of originating in a community-wide upsurge of censure: "the social ban will fall on them" (line 9). The rhyme in /ɛm/ between "them" (line 9) and "condemn" (line 11) adds to the momentum of the drive to ostracize the rich women on the basis of their supposed immorality. However, this mode of forward thinking, which diverges from Verhaeren's consistent focus on the present, is vague about the parameters of "the social judgment" (line 11) that is supposed to occur "Some day" (lines 9 and 11). Although there is the promise of "A juster world" (line 13), nothing suggests an imminent reversal of fortunes in favor of ethics over economics. Manufacturing-driven London does not appear favorable to "pure women and […] honoured men" (line 14) seeking to right the wrongs of wealth inequalities, so the fierce affirmation of "shall separate them then" (line 13) takes on a note of tragic futility. The sonnet thus closes with a sense that the city is doomed to remain a gritty place because capitalist structures carry more weight than currents of social revolution.

Verhaeren's "Londres" evokes industrial grime in four quatrains containing three twelve-syllable lines and one ten-syllable line, with the exception of a fourteen-syllable line at the end, all arranged in a rhyme scheme of abab–cdcd–efef–ghgh:

Et ce Londres de fonte & de bronze, mon âme,
Où des plaques de fer claquent sous des hangars,
  Où des voiles s'en vont sans Notre-Dame
Pour étoile, s'en vont là-bas vers les hasards.

Gares de suie & de fumée, où du gaz pleure
Ses spleens d'argent lointain sur des chemins d'éclair,
  Où des bêtes d'ennui bâillent à l'heure
Dolente immensément, qui tinte à Westminster.

Et ces quais infinis de lanternes fatales,
Parques dont les fuseaux plongent aux profondeurs,

Et ces marins noyés sous des pétales
Des flots éclaboussés comme une boue en fleurs.

Et ces châles & ces gestes de femmes soûles,
Et ces alcools en lettres d'or jusques au toit,
Et tout à coup la mort parmi ces foules,
Ô mon âme du soir, ce Londres noir qui traîne en toi!

(This London of cast-iron and bronze, my soul,
where under shed-roofs sheets of metal clang;
where sailing ships disappear, without Notre Dame
for star, disappear, out there, towards fate.

Stations of soot and smoke, where the gas weeps
its spleens of distant silver towards paths of light
where beasts of boredom yawn at the hour
that chimes, immensely mournful, from Westminster.

And this unending embankment of deadly lamps,
the fates whose spindles dive to the depths;
and these drowned mariners, beneath petals
of mud flowers where the flame casts its glimmers.

And these gestures of drunken women and these shawls,
this liquor in golden letters high as roofs,
and suddenly death amongst these multitudes,
O my evening soul, this dark London that drags in you.)

Recognizable places are key to Verhaeren's poem from its third word to its last line, and spatial dynamics gain prominence from the frequency of "Où" with a locative meaning (lines 2, 3 and 7). The opening and closing references to London are suggestive of claustrophobia in the blackened city brimming with metallurgical manufacturing: "ce Londres de fonte & de bronze" (line 1); "ce Londres noir" (line 16). As a pair of alloys, cast iron (iron + carbon) and bronze (copper + tin) point to elemental hybridity made possible by technological sophistication. The prominence of metal in the capital's physical geography brings to mind the common perception of progress as related to the expansion of heavy industry. Begrimed buildings are as ubiquitous as factories containing the clatter of iron manufacture: "des plaques de fer claquent sous des hangars" (line 2). With the repetition of /lak/ in "plaques […] claquent" amplifying the metallic din, the onomatopoeic representation of noise pollution evokes the produce of blast furnaces playing an integral role in the development of modern infrastructure ranging from railways to bridges. As opposed to Cambridge's downward looking account of the capital's gritty nature, this critique is directed to the industrial skyline. Structures of mass production contrast with the weathered stone of buildings with a Gothic appearance in the midst of London: "l'heure / Dolente […] qui tinte à Westminster" (lines 7–8). Due to the combination of enjambment and alliteration in /t/, the sense of a death knell for wretched Londoners is powerful. The mention of Westminster encourages reflection on the import of Westminster Abbey and the Palace of Westminster: as a Royal Peculiar, the Abbey draws attention to Victoria's role as Queen of the United Kingdom and Empress of India; governmental issues stem from the Palace that encompasses the Houses of Parliament and the clock tower commonly known as "Big Ben" by synecdoche. The sorrowful peal weaves a tragic atmosphere in the area occupied by Lord

Salisbury's second ministry (August 1886–August 1892), during which the Conservatives sought to address unsanitary conditions of particular severity in the capital. Situated adjacent to Westminster, the Thames is subtly present in the third line, which hints at ships departing along London's major waterway during the "Scramble for Africa" of the 1880s: "des voiles s'en vont sans Notre-Dame / Pour étoile" (lines 3–4). The poem's geographical coordinates take on a transnational dynamic by calling to mind the Gothic church of Notre-Dame in central Antwerp, just fifteen miles down the river Scheldt from Verhaeren's birthplace in Sint-Amands. This Anglo-Belgian differentiation suggests that London's Anglican edifice is less valuable than the Catholic building at the heart of Belgium's second city, since the vessels on the Thames lack situational reassurance, as reflected in the enjambment. Such uncertainty suffuses the lives of the few humans in the narrative.

In the company of a slew of human presences, the narrator's soul is apostrophized with singular intimacy at the poem's beginning and end. Akin to the double reference to London, two instances of an inward looking address act as a frame: "mon âme" (line 1); "Ô mon âme du soir, ce Londres noir qui traîne en toi!" (line 16). This evocation of spiritual enclosure reinforces the impression of London as a suffocating entity. A falling cadence in the first line, syllabically punctuated as 10+2, conveys the disconcerting rhythms of life in the Victorian metropolis. The link between the capital's black nature and the soul in a nocturnal state indicates pervasive melancholy aggravated by environmental circumstances, with the narrator's dark brooding corresponding to the hue of the soot-filled air. Through the repetition of /waʀ/ in "soir […] noir" (line 16), a resounding note of finality is brought to bear on the association between personal dismay and the grittiness of London, particularly in the gloom of twilight. In the final line, a peculiarity of form marks the climax of Verhaeren's gritty metropoetics: the expectation of a twelve-syllable line balanced around the caesura is subverted by the eight-syllable phrase following the comma at the sixth syllable. As a result, the poem ends with a fourteen-syllable line that jars with the twelve- and ten-syllable lines elsewhere. Such an expansion beyond the customary length of lines of French poetry hints at geographical and sociocultural disturbances of a seminal nature. In this regard, the poem's composition is symptomatic of increasing anxieties: "in 'Londres,' [...] Verhaeren begins to regard the city not only as a new environment, but as the correlative for a new aspect of consciousness which he [...] does not welcome [...]. He sees it rather as a […] foreign, inimical element from which he wishes to be freed" (Thum 1994, 222). By way of a disconcerting structure, the ending to the four quatrains foregrounds the desire to escape the adverse mindset associated with the harsh place. Beyond the dynamic of soul-searching related to troubled times, humans appear in homogeneous groups at three junctures in the second half. In contrast to Cambridge's street-level depiction, the perception of these crowded bodies comes from an elevated position, as in the case of observing a scene from a top-floor window. London's maritime culture comes to the fore in a deadly fashion through the specter of "ces marins noyés" (line 11). In addition to the somber idea of sailors drowning after a shipwreck, the image is redolent of people throwing themselves into the Thames out of despair at their living conditions. At a symbolic level, the line is a macabre corollary of Londoners submerged in a sea of smog. Inebriated women come into the picture in the final quatrain: "ces châles & ces gestes de femmes soûles" (line 13). There is nothing dignified about these female inhabitants' meagre shawls and alcohol-impaired gestures. The rhyme in /ul/ between "soûles" (line 13) and "foules" (line 15) sharpens awareness of throngs of disadvantaged people driven to excessive consumption of spirits in hard times. Such drunkenness was so concerning during William Gladstone's third ministry (February–July 1886) that the Liberal majority enacted legislation to counter the uptake of intoxicating liquors. Among the crowds pouring through London's gritty streets, death stalks the weak:

"tout à coup la mort parmi ces foules" (line 15). Assonance in /u/ magnifies the shock of mortality in the bleak metropolis: "tout […] coup […] foules" (line 15). By underscoring life's abruptness in the most tumultuous of places, the narrative raises the issue of limitations on life expectancy for many people surrounded by the trappings of mass production.

Few objects feature in the murky account, but two instances are telling, namely the "lanternes fatales" (line 9) and the "lettres d'or" (line 14) advertising alcohol. In the case of the lamps, the specter of death surrounds the structures that recall the installation of incandescent lighting in key streets following the Electric Lighting Act in 1882. Despite this attempt to reduce accidents and crime in the smog-filled city by developing "chemins d'éclair" (line 6), the poem suggests that safety had not improved along the "quais infinis" (line 9) bordering the Thames. Victoria Embankment springs to mind as London's first public space with electric lighting, following the installation of Yablochkov Candles in 1878. The dense alliteration of /l/ and /t/ in "lanternes fatales" (line 9) emphasizes danger in the riverside space that has an air of overwhelming the senses due to seemingly limitless artifice. Such architectural magnitude sets up the mythology of the Roman deities whose fateful spindles encompass human existence: "Parques dont les fuseaux plongent aux profondeurs" (line 10). This correspondence between icons of antique culture and industrial modernity adds to the drama of the nebulous scene. Just beyond the beacons of illumination, humans flurry like moths through an atmosphere of profound gloom. Similarly worrying are the noxious overtones of the "alcools en lettres d'or jusques au toit" (line 14). Corruption across swathes of London is implied through the imposing publicity for alcohol that exemplifies the importance of the vertical in the narrative, which varies from Cambridge's primarily horizonal outlook. In the second half of Verhaeren's poem, prominent instances of "Et ces" (lines 9, 11, 13, and 14), which chime with the conspicuous positioning of "Et ce" (line 1) and "Et" (line 15), contribute to a crescendo in the litany of iniquities. With the depiction of alcohol's supremacy stretching to the rooftops, the problems of inebriation look to be far from waning among Londoners grappling with industrial modernity. The narrative resounds with a note of tragedy regarding the false promise of alcohol used to alleviate the grittiness of metropolitan life.

London's polluted nature fuels a persistent strain of bitterness. Toxic fumes are vividly present: "Gares de suie & de fumée, où du gaz pleure / Ses spleens d'argent lointain" (lines 5–6). Ecological anxieties abound, with a sense of Londoners harmed by smoke inhalation, as well as buildings blackened by soot. This sensitivity to airborne contamination, which differs from Cambridge's privileging of issues on the ground, is indicative of disquiet over the unchecked pace of industrialization occurring in Belgium as much as the United Kingdom. Verhaeren's portrayal of railway stations as sources of pollutants—rather than sites of technological achievements—eclipses positive outcomes from industrial progress. Murkiness in the manmade environment is reinforced by the repetition of /ga/ in "Gares […] gaz" (line 5). With the personification of the excessive gas as a weeping figure, highlighted by the fifth line's enjambment, the quatrain accentuates poisonous emissions causing environmental degradation and human pain in substantial measure. The rhyme in /lœʀ/ between "pleure" (line 5) and "l'heure" (line 7) heightens awareness of Londoners' anguish resulting from prolonged exposure to toxins. The reference to "spleens" is redolent of Charles Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), particularly the fourth component of the "Spleen" quartet that has much in common with Verhaeren's portrayal of London: "le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle / Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis" (the low and heavy sky weighs like a lid / On the groaning spirit prey to longstanding malaise) (Baudelaire 1857, 144; lines 1–2). The Parisian poet's compelling evocations of anguish amid the gloom

of industrial modernity attracted Verhaeren's admiration: "Baudelaire […] est malade, le premier, de cette glorieuse maladie de nerfs qui affectera tous les sensitifs artistes après lui" (Baudelaire is the first to be afflicted by the glorious affliction of the nerves which comes to affect all the sensitive artists after him) (1887, 210). Verhaeren's account of London extends the physical and psychological dimensions of Baudelairean ennui by way of the fumes endowed with a splenetic character. Their silver hue is unsettling because an anomalous set of metallic elements looks to be disrupting the atmosphere, and the distance-oriented phrasing of "lointain" foregrounds the pervasiveness of the harmful gas. As a corollary to the personified emissions venting spite over London, an animal-based allegory plays a part in emphasizing psychological problems: "des bêtes d'ennui bâillent […] / […] immensément" (lines 7–8). This metaphor conveys a choking atmosphere in the capital's sky, since the beastly incarnations of melancholia yawn in a way mirroring a reaction to a lack of oxygen. Due to the four-syllable density of "immensément," there is a feeling of overwhelming negativity about the metropolis in the throes of modernity. Such a detailed account of the city's problems indicates "la fascination exercée sur le poète par le Londres mortifère, image de la modernité douloureuse" (the poet's obsession with noxious London as the symbol of agonizing modernity) (Marx 1994, 22). The account of the waters of the Thames offers a further sign of a deep-seated preoccupation with the lethal effects of heavy industry: "Des flots éclaboussés comme une boue en fleurs" (line 12). By means of a simile based on the anti-modern materiality of mud, the narrative draws attention to the river's besmirched tides. The tainted currents, redolent of contamination produced by effluence from manufacturing, allude to toxic waste generated at disturbing rates.

In conclusion, the distinctive perspectives of Cambridge and Verhaeren intersect in their expression of common concerns about life in London around the end of the 1880s. In an era of major changes due to technological modernization, sociocultural values are high on the agenda for both authors, who have similar ways of addressing the status of women. Equally comparable is the attention afforded to the condition of human bodies in the capital's crowded streets, in which infectious diseases go unnoticed in a remarkable fashion, given that the city often suffered from epidemics. The two accounts' metropoetics also display commonalities regarding the highlighting of London's gritty nature through a stationary perspective and auditory elements of style, not least rhyme and alliteration at key moments. Such correspondences make differences in approach all the more illuminating. In relation to women, Cambridge purports the immorality of wealth gained through marriage, whereas Verhaeren emphasizes the problem of drunken escapism linked to golden advertising. As to other aspects of human identity, Cambridge is outward facing, with her concentration on poor people deprived of food and lodgings; by contrast, Verhaeren is rather inward facing, in that he devotes considerable attention to psychological malaise. Perceptually, each author's outlook on the city is unique, since Cambridge gives the impression of street-level immersion, and Verhaeren has the aura of an elevated position, such as a top-floor window. Compared to Verhaeren's upward looking account of the industrial skyline, Cambridge offers a downward looking critique of litter and waste. Horizontality is to Cambridge as verticality is to Verhaeren because the Anglophone poet privileges soiled terrain, while the Francophone poet focalizes airborne contamination. Place names, which Verhaeren utilizes to situate a cross-Channel differentiation, are disregarded by Cambridge. With respect to temporality, Verhaeren diverges from Cambridge's forward thinking about social judgement by insisting on current problems. Pollution preoccupies Verhaeren more than Cambridge: the Belgian expresses dismay about the impact of heavy industry in a way that is symptomatic of his roots in a nation undergoing modernization at an even faster rate than the United Kingdom. In essence, Cambridge's depiction is gritty because of economic issues, and Verhaeren's

depiction is gritty because of environmental issues. Ultimately, each author constructs a version of metropoetics that has as much to do with form as content: Cambridge's sonnet brings a touch of urbanity to a mode of expression with roots stretching to Petrarch; Verhaeren's four quatrains reterritorialize London through a meter extrinsic to the focalized society. In terms of key versification, insistent rhythms and striking rhymes amplify the socially critical outbursts of Cambridge's composition, whereas surging cadences and dense sound-patterns reinforce the starkly mechanical world of Verhaeren's piece. At the level of style, Cambridge is more explicit and emphatic than Verhaeren, but less specific about London's topography, which the Francophone narrative poignantly evokes through a greater involvement of the senses. Each writer's poetics of place thus presents varied modes of dealing with the existential complexities of the United Kingdom's industrial capital. In sum, these two examples illustrate the fruitfulness of addressing the changing climate of our world through creative works from the nineteenth century, since the human-scale stories of such cultural artefacts provide a pathway to emotional engagement with the Industrial Revolution's macroscale nature.

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